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10 Rules to Fight Wordiness

Wordiness is a common problem that you will see in any long-form article or essay. Just go back to the last article you have read and re-read the first paragraph.

Most likely, it will be a filler that failed to transition into the core of the topic. It is a guilty pleasure for writers with little consequence unless we overindulge and lose our audience. In your case, wordiness will decide whether you fit the essay within the recommended word limit or you annoy the MBA Admissions team.

Some MBA online applications have systems in place to cut the excess words. The last-minute edits just before uploading the essay can remove the core of your essay.

You can fight wordiness in MBA essays without losing your original voice with these 10 techniques:

1) Two Sentence Rule

A technique that we found effective in real-time editing is the two-sentence rule; you write two sentences freely, pause for a moment, and then re-read the sentences. With this, you will immediately spot unnecessary phrases, words, and complex sentences. Editing is delayed just enough to distance yourself from your creation.

2) Look for Redundancies

The easiest wordiness fixes are redundancies in phrases, words, or expressions. As readers, we remember in 100-word chunks. Once we grasp the concept in the paragraph, we refresh our memory and consume the next flow of words. If you had used a non-regular word, do not repeat them within a 2-paragraph radius.

3) Make it Conversational

When we say, “make your essays more conversational,” most applicants edit and turn their essays into personal blog posts or overdo them with dialogues. What we mean by conversational is avoiding all the common phrases used in formal writing like “with regard to,” “on a regular basis”, “at this point in time,” “in order to,” and the list goes on.

You can replace these phrases with one word:

For example

“With regard to” – about

“On a regular basis” – regularly

“At this point in time” – now

“In order to” - to

4) Three Preposition Guideline

We love and regularly use prepositions in our articles. It gives us a certain rhythm and simplicity in writing, but MBA Application Essays require a different approach. The regular use of prepositions can add up and contribute as much as 20-25% towards the word count.

Avoid this by using the three-preposition rule.

To follow the rule, combine the prepositional phrases to an adjective-noun format whenever possible.

For Example:

I was part of the Blackhawks team that went on to score the winning goal for the Stanley Cup finals in 2015.

There are a lot of prepositions. It gives a nice rhythm, but there is scope for editing.

The edited version reads like this:

“As a Blackhawks forward, I scored the winning goal for the 2015 Stanley Cup finals.”

Instead of **“part of ..”** you can use an adjective-noun phrase. In this case, **“Blackhawks forward.”**

You can also remove “went on to”

Rephrase **“for the Stanley Cup finals in 2015”** to

“for the 2015 Stanley Cup finals.”

Even if it is just one word, it will add up when you have 50-60 sentences.

On the first edit, it gives the impression that the flow is getting affected, but once you go through the whole editing process, you will understand why smaller sacrifices in the flow are essential for making the larger point about your candidacy.

5) Remove Past Tense Additives

Essays require you to introspect and connect two events. When an applicant indulges in the past tense, the natural tendency is to add more words.

For Example:

I entered the team meeting and made a recommendation, "People in the team need assurance that the issue of their performance review is handled in a professional manner."

Do not eliminate all past tenses but watch out for word fillers.

The reason why applicants use "the issue" or explicitly mention the problem or challenge is because they assume that the reader doesn't understand that the next line is the problem statement.

In this example, 'performance review' is the problem. You don't have to mention explicitly like "**the issue of** "

The next filler is the description.

For example, How the performance review should be handled "is handled in a professional manner."

You can directly mention "handled professionally."

The edited version becomes:

I entered the team meeting and made a recommendation, "People in the team need assurance that their performance review is handled professionally."

You removed 6 words in just one edit.

6) Remove Secondary Facts

When you write the first draft, the secondary facts seem untouchable, but once you near the application deadline, the inevitable fact edits will happen. There are no hard and fast rules for removing secondary facts. Remove the secondary fact, and see if the elimination affects context. It will certainly impact the narrative but given a choice between context and narrative, the former is much more important.

For example:

“The 3-member team pushed through a non-stop 48-hour coding Marathon, fixing the bugs, sleeping in our conference room with a make-shift 3x7 feet single bed, and strategically used the sleep time to meet the 1st August deadline.”

First thing you have to do before editing is to categorize facts into primary and secondary:

So the primary facts are

Primary Facts

- 3-Member
- 48-hour

The secondary facts are:

Secondary Facts

- 3x7 feet
- 1st August

3-Member proves the limitation of the team size, and **48-hour** shows a sense of urgency to the deadline. Both are essential facts. If you remove **1st August**, it doesn't impact the narrative, but if you remove **3x7 feet**, you will fail to completely capture the sense of sacrifice, but **'Single Bed'** and **'make-shift'** demonstrate that the bed was uncomfortable. The balance between context and narrative is crucial in a 250 to 500-word essay.

The rewritten line looks like this:

“The 3-member team pushed through a non-stop 48-hour coding Marathon, fixing the bugs, sleeping in our conference room with a make-shift single bed, and strategically used the sleep time to meet the Deadline.”

Additional context would make sense in a novel or a blog post but not in an essay where words are scarce.

7) Choose Extreme Qualifiers Carefully

When we are advising you, for example, on fighting wordiness, the narrative is filled with warnings and recommendations.

Warnings, by definition, need extreme qualifiers.

This is a line I have written as an advice:

“If you remove 1st August, it doesn’t impact the narrative, but if you remove 3x5 feet, you will fail to completely capture the sense of sacrifice.”

In essays, you should never give advice to the Admissions team. Even life lessons should have a less preachy tone.

Read the essay for ‘*extremely, very, completely, entirely, really, rather, fairly and other extreme qualifiers*’, and remove it without any pre-judgment. Now read the sentence again. I bet the removal had no impact on the context of the essay.

8) One-Syllable words

When you are asked to write a diary, with no expert reviews to follow, the words you use are simple with one syllable. The moment you are aware that you are writing for a Business School, flowery phrases and complex words make a special appearance.

If you are not sure whether you can write an essay with just one-syllable words, take note of these words: act, add, brand, chance, ask, back, fast, has had, have, chat, last, pass, when, text, test, them, best, check, edge, met, next, sell, set, end, fell, else, hurt, curb, turn, learn, search, world, and worst.

The list is a partial set of a large range of One Syllable Words that you can use in your essay writing. When you use One-Syllable words, the points are made clearly without any Jargon.

It is impossible to stick to the one-syllable rule, but with an awareness of the rule that “simplicity = one-syllable words”, the wordiness in your essay will go down.

9) Sentence Length Diversity

Diversity of sentence length improves readability, but the awareness that you can vary the sentence length enables you to use simple words. Applicants feel the limitation in expressing their thoughts when they follow some rigid rule on sentence length like:

25-words/sentence is an ideal length for explaining a complex concept.

The word processing tools that summarize sentence length, paragraph length, and total word count do not take into consideration your ability to diversify sentence length.

Don't force your thoughts with a one-length rule, but follow the “*One Idea in One Paragraph*” rule.

10) Avoid Jargons When in Doubt

Jargons save word count, but applicants tend to overuse it. Use Jargons according to the knowledge and exposure of the essay reviewer. The term Information Technology (IT) will not puzzle a reviewer. Jargons that reveal the function require no explanation. The problem arises when understanding Jargons require some level of functional knowledge.

Banking, IT, and Pharma dominate the industries with the most Jargons. The term ‘Asset Management’ gives the reviewer a broader understanding of the job function, but if the entire essay is about professional achievement, offering context on Asset Management becomes a necessity.

If you have any doubt that the Jargon is inconclusive, strategically create a narrative explaining it.

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Good Luck,

Atul Jose

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